

ASSOCIATION NEWS.

Membership in the American Medical Association. The Proposed Change in Name.

GEORGE H. SIMMONS, M. D., LL. D., Chicago.

Explanatory Note:—This abstract of an address before the Conference of State Secretaries is republished from the American Medical Association Bulletin of November 15, 1912, on the request of the Judicial Council. The House of Delegates referred the report of the committee to formulate amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws to extend membership, presented at the 1912 session (Journal, June 15, 1912, p. 1899) to the Judicial Council with power to confer with constituent associations. The Council, after careful consideration, endorses the proposed change and takes this means of bringing the subject to the constituent associations as well as directing to it the attention of the members.

I have been asked to discuss the present conditions of membership in the American Medical Association and the proposed change, which has been under discussion recently. While this is not directly related to the object of this conference, the discussion of uniform regulation of state membership, it is so closely connected with it that I can not refuse to take advantage of the opportunity of discussing the question before such a large representation of state secretaries.

To get a clear understanding of what the present term "members" of the American Medical Association means, it is necessary to go back a little in the history of the Association.

The American Medical Association always has been a delegated body; only "delegates" ever had a right to take part in its proceedings.

"Permanent members" was a term originally applied to those delegates who connected themselves permanently with the Association after they had served as delegates. "Permanent members," however, had no rights except those of attending the meetings and taking part in the scientific work. In 1883, the Journal was started and the following year, for the purpose of increasing the circulation of the Journal, there was created another class: "Members by Application." A member of any so-called affiliated society could become a "member by application" simply by making application for membership and paying the annual dues. The difference between "members by application" and "permanent members" was that the latter had been delegates, whereas the former became members simply by making application. Neither "permanent members" nor "members by application" had vote or voice in business meetings.

Membership in the A. M. A. Today on the Same Basis as the Former "Members by Application."

Briefly, we have the following situation:

1. The voting membership of the organization is the combined membership of all the 2,000 (more or less) component county societies, amounting approximately to 70,000 members. These elect the delegates to the House of Delegates of the state associations; they in turn elect the delegates who form the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association. Before 1901 the delegates to the American Medical Association were elected, or appointed, by the "affiliated" societies, which included local, district and state societies. Since 1901, that is, since the reorganization, the dele-

gates to the national body are elected not by local, district and state societies, but by the state societies alone.

2. The so-called "members of the American Medical Association" are the direct successors of the old "members by application." By their payment of dues and their subscriptions to the Journal, they were and are today the supporting or contributing group of the members of the organization.

3. The House of Delegates is composed of approximately 150 members, who are elected by the various state Houses of Delegates, which are in turn composed of delegates elected by the members of the component county societies. The House of Delegates of the American Medical Association, therefore, is created by, and represents the combined membership of all the county societies of all the states; it is not elected by, nor does it represent, the present "members of the American Medical Association" as such; it never has.

The result is that we have two classes which could be called members. First, the actual, logical memberships of 70,000, usually designated as "the membership of the organization." Second, the 36,822 contributing or supporting members, who are designated as "members," although these "members of the American Medical Association" have no more privileges than have all members of the organization, except the right to take part in section work. This present situation I have had shown on the accompanying chart (Chart 1). The membership of the American Medical Association, at present 36,822, is an inner circle of the membership of county societies, while the House of Delegates is a still smaller circle composed of those who have been elected to represent the members of the organization of the whole country.

Now the situation itself is perfectly logical and is in every way to be commended. The trouble is that we have not named our groups accurately. Those whom we now call "members of the American Medical Association" are really those members of the organization who, in addition to supporting their county and state associations, also contribute to the support of the American Medical Association, while for the actual membership of 70,000 members we have no distinctive name.

The change that has been proposed is not a change in condition at all. It is simply a change in name. It is proposed to designate the 70,000 members included in the large outer circle (Chart 2) as "members of the American Medical Association," which they really are and always have been, while those included in the inner circle (that is, those members in good standing of their county and state societies, who also pay \$5 a year to support the work of the American Medical Association) are to be called "fellows of the American Medical Association" instead of "members." This will make no change in the membership standing or relations of any man. If this suggestion is adopted, all members in good standing in their state organizations will be designated as "members of the American Medical Association," while those members who contribute \$5 a year to support the work of the Association will be designated as "fellows of the American Medical Association." In other words, those who are now known as "members" of the American Medical Association will be known as "fellows" of the American Medical Association, while the term "members" will be applied to the entire, combined membership of the component county societies of the whole country.

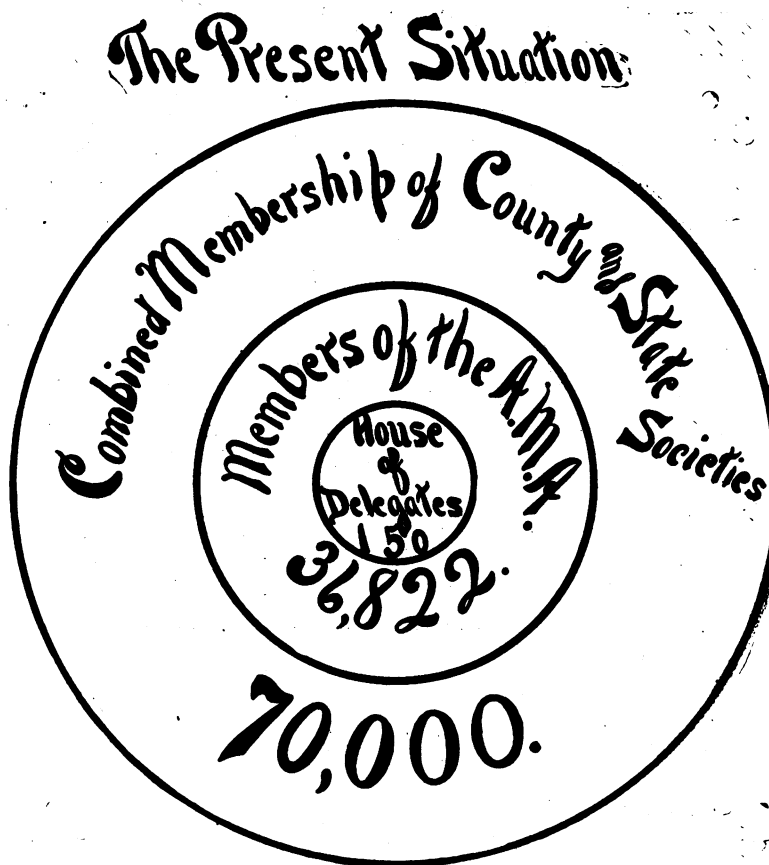


Chart 1

This plan has several advantages. In the first place it will give us a name for the entire membership of the organization, which we have never had before. Before 1901 they were referred to as members of "affiliated" societies, and since then they have been called, for lack of a distinctive name, "members of the organization." Another advantage will be that it will make clear that the voting power lies with the 70,000 members and not with the 36,822 "fellows." When this plan was first proposed, some got the impression that the intention was to compel the 70,000 members of the county societies to become "supporting members" of the American Medical Association, as the term is now understood. This, of course, would be a ridiculous proposition. The proposed change contemplates leaving membership conditions exactly as they are; it contemplates changing the name, and not the relation.

One great disadvantage prior to the reorganization of the American Medical Association in 1901 was the fact that we had no name by which to designate the delegates. As soon as the name "House of Delegates" was adopted, then the function of the delegates became clear at once. The Association also has labored under the disadvantage, ever since its reorganization, that there has been no name by which to designate the actual voting membership, because the term "members" had been ap-

plied to the supporting body. The proposed change simply recognizes this fact, designating as "members" those who really are members, and designating the supporting members as "fellows."

I have already given some reasons for making the change, but there is another and more important; in fact, it is the paramount reason. Up to the present time, the members of the organization have not realized that they are, in reality, members of the American Medical Association. They regard the American Medical Association as something entirely apart from them, something in which they have no interest. These members of the organization are through their elected representatives responsible for what the American Medical Association is doing, or what it ought to do and is not doing, but they do not realize this, hence they are not interested. They do not appreciate that the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association, which they elect, is the body that is doing the work through the officers, trustees, councils, etc., which they elect through their representatives in the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association, select. While only a change in name, I think the subject is of the utmost importance. I hope that all of you will look into it carefully, so as to understand exactly what is intended, and then will explain it to your members at the first opportunity.

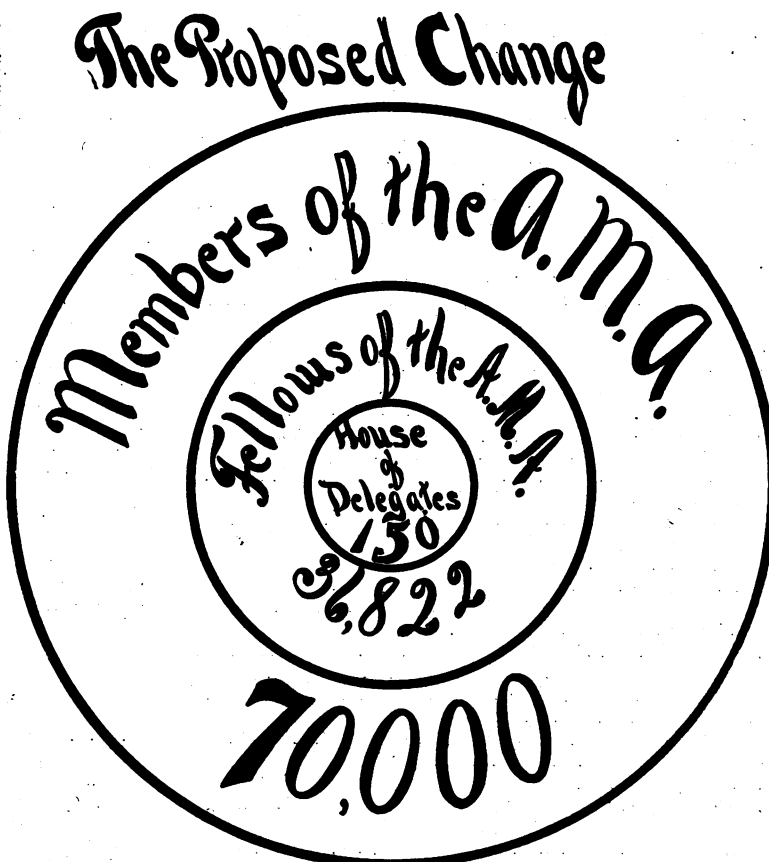


Chart 2